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Abstract

'The controversy in the Anglican Church around homosexuality within the priesthood is considered in terms of the kind of world-view held by an important faction of those in opposition. An example of research into the world-view of Charismatic Christians running an Anglican outreach project in the UK is taken to gain insight into the world-wide Evangelical Charismatic resurgence. Parallels are drawn with the position taken by the Southern hemisphere Anglicans and it is argued that this opposition is unlikely to be yielding to the secularising influences of pluralistic industrialised societies. Robertson (1985) proposes that religious forms in differentiated societies, such as Charismatic Evangelicalism, draw strength from global integration. It is argued that this thesis is relevant to understanding the nature of divisions within Anglicanism as these world-wide factions cut across and divide a broad church. That the world contains varying conditions of secularisation and counter-secularisation (Berger, 1999) places additional and intolerable strain on a world-wide communion that tries to embrace a plurality.'

Keywords: *Charismatic Evangelicalism; Church Of England; Counter-secularisation; Globalisation; Secularisation.*

Globalisation and the Church of England

1.1 The background to the following discussion is the crisis in the world-wide Anglican communion, brought to a head by the election of Gene Robinson as the first openly gay Episcopalian bishop. When viewed in a global context, it serves (along with other current international events) as an illustration of the view that the re-examination of the secularisation thesis in recent decades has been a pursuit of greater relevance to current affairs than its nineteenth century originators would have predicted. An attempt at a sociological understanding of the dysfunctional family dynamics of the Church of England requires that ideas of secularisation and counter-secularisation (and their influence on ethical questions) be sufficiently sophisticated to account for complexities of religion and ethics in the twenty-first century. The nature of the recent disputes around sexuality and the particular players involved show up the globalised nature of the forces at work. While the Church of England with its pre-modern roots may seek to be an inclusive body that embraces all its parishioners in the fold^[1] (Martin, 1967; Troeltsch, 1931/1971; Yinger, 1957/1971), the accommodation of a secular ethic of inclusion which this would entail is hitting substantial resistance from within.

1.2 This essay will seek to explore the nature of this resistance and will argue that the world-view of those resisting appears to be irreconcilably at odds with the liberal world-view. Moreover, it is the very different strategy of facilitating religious life in secularised society that bolsters the resisters' world-view and makes any kind of compromise appear unlikely. It will be argued further that this gives the resisters a commonality with Anglicans in less secularised nations who are in a position to head up the resistance (and indeed must do so in order to survive in a less secularised context). Therefore, the central discussion here is the nature of the world-view of Anglicans resistant to the ratification of practising homosexuality in the priesthood and their global alliances, and the implications of this for increasing strain on an institution that seeks to maintain its inclusive heritage.

1.3 To aid with an understanding of this world-view, a very brief outline of the findings of some previously unpublished research^[2] will be given at the outset of this discussion. This research explored the world-view characteristic of the members of staff in a small community outreach project based in a city in the UK run by a large Charismatic Anglican church working mainly with people who were homeless, were suffering from AIDS^[3] or involved in prostitution. Whilst Charismatic Anglicanism is only one section of those resisting, it will give some insights into the nature of at least a significant element of the resistance in the UK and it will

serve as a case for comparison with the views expressed by African Anglicans leading the resistance internationally. A commonality between the two will be shown, in particular an absolutist biblical moral base as opposed to situational ethics.

A Globalised Anglican Faction: A Brief Example

2.1 The research was conducted in 1991 at the Westown Project^[4] which was staffed mainly by volunteers, some of whom were members of the Anglican church who sponsored the project and others who were members of an international (Pentecostal/Charismatic) missionary organisation recruiting mainly young people world-wide to work short-term in missions teams. The term 'Charismatic' is one they would recognise as applying to themselves. Bryan Wilson defines 'the somewhat amorphous movement known as Charismatic Renewal...' as a 'reassertion of the validity of what are known as the gifts of Pentecost, the principal of which is the capacity to 'speak in unknown tongues' (Wilson, 1982:140). As a particularly apt illustration of the theme of the present discussion, one newsletter produced by this missionary organisation (in 1990) was entitled *The Church of The Nineties: Becoming Global Christians*. The staff were international but the sponsoring church was also strongly connected internationally with the world-wide charismatic community in many other ways. The strong world-view-sharing/reinforcing relationships enjoyed by this church and the project were not with Anglicans, other than fellow Charismatics. The relationships with the Anglican hierarchy were strained by lack of shared world-view and frustration at being hemmed into a locality by the parish system. They enjoyed strong ties with non-Anglican Charismatic movements/denominations from the UK but particularly from the United States and Canada. Exchange of ministry (speakers) was regular and interdenominational Charismatic conferences led to a cohesive world-view that was international in scope.

2.2 The focus of the research was to gain empirical lifeworld data that could be used to re-examine varieties of the secularisation thesis in so far as they would make predictions about a phenomenon such as the Westown Project. Nine^[5] team-members were interviewed in-depth (focused but unstructured) and asked to relate their life-story, detailing as many important events as possible. They were not asked directly to relate their *religious* experience but all went into these areas in great depth, resulting in transcripts that were particularly heavy with 'thick description' of religious beliefs and practices. A textual analysis was performed to examine the language used and the concepts (and particularly the shared meanings) that lay at the core of the world-view.

2.3 The broad world-view themes that united the staff members and characterised the particular form of religion they represent were: a high level of supernaturalism reinforced by everyday experience; the view (tied in with the supernaturalism) that there were clear-cut realms of evil and good, and issues of sin which were understood as contravention of biblical precepts; that good and evil spiritual forces were at work at all levels of the social/personal world; personal, unmediated experiences of God who intervenes directly in believers' lives; and truth is not relative, the Bible contains the only authentic representation of this truth.

2.4 A finding of particular relevance to the current crisis in Anglicanism is the extent to which a strong commitment is held to a conservative morality based on the belief that the Bible is the inspired word of God. In situations such as the Westown Project, resistance to secularising influences forcing a moderation of this perspective is strong because of the insulation provided by a strongly interrelated community of the like-minded. This is based in a highly experiential form of supernaturalism that is continually reinforced through communal religious practice. A differentiated society is tackled head on with a world-view that expects opposition, conceptualised as a spiritual conflict. Liberal Anglicanism is not seen as a credible alternative that needs to be considered but as a world-view that is contrary to God's revealed word and is therefore a device of the opposition in the spiritual conflict. This bares comparison with the language and stance taken by the Nigerian Primate when taking the lead in the opposition to gay bishops and the comments of the Nigerian Anglican worshippers quoted below. This, together with the commonality of world-view that characterises Charismatic Christianity world-wide, would suggest that the opposition to homosexual priests may be an indicator of an emerging religious counter-culture cutting across national cultures and religious denominations. For this reason, it will be argued that this phenomenon indicates support for the argument (as proposed by Robertson (1985) reviewed below) of those who maintain that global integration of movements, such as the Charismatic movement, makes globalisation a revitalising force in the context of pluralisation.

Secularisation and counter-secularisation: a global tension

3.1 The secularisation debate has moved a long way from the easy days when a simple formula of continual social progress was linked inevitably to industrialisation and the steady decline in the plausibility and practice of religion (Turner 1983; Davie 1999). The complexity of religion in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries requires a more sophisticated formula. If the reaction of religious groups to modernity can be

crudely divided into those that accommodate (liberal) and those that resist (conservative) then it appears that resistance halts declining attendance more successfully. In the UK, it is liberal Christianity that has seen dwindling congregations; and globally, Charismatic Christianity has seen continued growth which parallels the world-wide growth of Islam and Catholicism (Martin, 1999). While for some time the traditional secularisation thesis did fit the evidence well in a European context, the danger of Eurocentric sociology is demonstrated by a world context that makes Europe appear as the exception rather than the rule (Davie, 1999). Taking up this global view, Peter Berger (1999) sees a patchwork of secularisation and counter-secularisation that leaves the world as 'furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever' (p. 2).

3.2 Theorists diverge in their views on the impact of differentiated industrial society on religion. The view that globalisation may provide a new form of integration for religious movements is being articulated (see Beckford, 1989:119-121 for a discussion of this). For a recent example, Haynes concludes his 'postmodern' review of 'religion, secularization and politics' thus: In the past, popular religious groups functioned in isolation. This is no longer the case. Paralleling, and in some ways reinforcing, the impact of postmodernism, is that of globalisation. In the context of the spread of ideas, especially religious views, globalisation - particularly the impact of the spread of communications to all parts of the world - means that groups are no longer isolated. (Haynes, 1997:726)

3.3 This thesis has already been proffered more extensively by Roland Robertson (1985; Robertson and Chirico, 1985) and it is his ideas that seem to fit with both the findings from the Westown Project and the globalised and counter-secularised nature of the current opposition to gay bishops. Robertson's criticism is directed specifically at the widespread assumption that the processes of institutional differentiation and societalization *within separate societies* have eclipsed the social bonds of community and have consequently eradicated the grounds for religion. Against this view, he argues that the crystallization of a capitalist world-system has actually created a new, i.e. global, level of community which, in turn, is allegedly producing a freshly religious perspective on human existence. (Beckford, 1989: 120)

3.4 Intra-societal differentiation has been paralleled by inter-societal integration. A new kind of community and a new kind of global awareness is revitalising religion.

3.5 How then are we to read the signs indicated by the sexuality of priests controversy? If secularisation as experienced in Europe is seen as atypical, then we can ask what were the particular conditions, unique to Europe, that brought it about; and whether those conditions have changed in the transition from modernity to post-modernity. Leaving aside the question of those original conditions (which would require a discussion of the history of post-reformation Europe), it could be argued that the topic of this present discussion indicates the importance of two factors associated with present conditions: pluralisation and globalisation. Both could be said to contribute to, or at least enable, counter-secularisation. The strength of resistance to homosexual clergy in Anglicanism appears to owe as much to the society and culture of Nigeria as to anything else. Nigerian Anglicanism cannot afford to appear to endorse Western 'decadence' in the face of the cultural beliefs of parishioners and competition from other denominations and religions who advocate the strict moral code valued in that society. Given the strength of feeling in the Islamic community when the Miss World competition was due to be hosted in Nigeria, (with anger directed at Christian neighbours, guilty by association with the 'Christian' West) Archbishop Peter Akinola has a great deal to lose if seen to be compromising on the issue of homosexual clergy. Speaking at the time of Canon Jeffrey John's nomination as Bishop of Reading, he said it was a 'satanic attack on the Church of God' (Odunfa, 2003). Reporting from Lagos for the BBC (BBC News online: *Nigerian church slams gay bishop*, 23 June, 2003) Sola Odunfa asked three members of the congregation at the Church of Nigeria Cathedral in Lagos for their views: "It's an abomination. How can two men marry? It is against the Bible and it is against religion. They should not have appointed him at all." "These white people, they are very different. They are very funny. They have their own reasons for doing these things which are not African at all. We should not copy them." "I believe it is not right and if there is no reconciliation on the matter, the Church of Nigeria has every right to consider what is best for it, even if it means breaking up."

3.6 Another BBC correspondent in Nigeria (Pigott, 2003) reporting after the decision to appoint Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire, found few Anglicans willing to even talk about homosexuality, so strong was the taboo. His report points out that Nigeria has the world's largest concentration of practising Anglicans and suggests there is even talk of Nigerian Anglicanism taking over international leadership.

3.7 Taking the clear messages coming from African Anglicanism and given the life-world described by the staff of the Westown Project above, it seems that those resisting liberalisation are not simply less secularised in their beliefs, they have a very different world-view. While the Church of England is a global institution and subject to the strain of containing cultural conflict within itself, Charismatic Christianity is itself a global movement that intersects Anglicanism but is far larger than the Anglican Church numerically, even if nominal Anglicans are counted in (Martin, 1999). The Global Charismatic subculture (or counter-

culture?) is very strong with international organisations, conferences and media allowing members from mainstream denominations to avoid exposure to more liberal forms of Christianity within their denomination. Even those staff of the Westown Project who had not joined through the international interdenominational missionary organisation were linked into the international Charismatic movement through conferences, books and visiting speakers. The modernising pressures to embrace inclusion at the expense of world-view are well insulated against by such conditions of global solidarity. So both the global nature of Anglicanism and the global solidarity of the World-wide Charismatic movement illustrate the counter-secularising tendency of globalisation given that most of the world remains unsecularised (Berger, 1999).

3.8 As a brief (but important) aside at this point, the objection may be made that the picture of firm conservative opposition being painted here is overblown given that the strong opposition from traditionalists to women priests did not halt institutional change. However it is worth noting Berger's comment when characterising the world-wide Charismatic upsurge as combining 'biblical orthodoxy and a rigorous morality' and 'a violent rejection of traditional *machismo* (women play a key role in the Evangelical churches)' (1999, p.8-9). The controversy of women in the priesthood and the present controversy are part of the wider struggle for legitimacy between the discourses of 'accommodation' and 'exclusion' (Aldridge, 1994). But the influence of Charismatic Christianity on the two issues cannot be compared because the wider Charismatic movement is not universally against women priests in the way it is against gay priests, in line with evangelicalism generally. While both are questions of biblical hermeneutics and tradition, one is ecclesiastical, the other moral, forfeiting core values. When the motion to allow women priests was debated in the synod 'many of the speeches in favour of the motion were made by Evangelicals seeking to reassure their constituency that Scripture did not forbid it' (Aldridge, 1994:508).

3.9 Pluralisation has been seen as a secularising force. Stable traditional societies based on universal religious symbolism (*Gemeinschaft*) have given way to industrialised and urbanised life (*Gesellschaft*) in which the religious monopolies are broken up (Wilson, 1982; 1985). Pluralisation causes a crisis of plausibility for religion when adherents are exposed to many competing alternatives (Berger 1969). Yet pluralisation cuts both ways. While the monopoly of traditional religion has been broken up, any secular alternative will find its attempts at a new universalism similarly attacked. A pluralistic society can never be fully secularised because there will always be a niche for counter secularisation and because the secular alternative will always be forced into whichever niches are open to it. The current debate surrounding the loss of community versus the transformation of community into network communities (rather than communities based on geographical proximity) (Wellman, 2001) would suggest that network communities could well provide religious niches highly resistant to secularising or liberalising influences, which brings us back to the significance of global networks in Charismatic Christianity. Hadden (1987) sees the traditional secularisation thesis as too bound up in the ideology of its originators. Perhaps this is why they believed that the rational scientific (sociological) view of life would prevail and take the dominant position; pluralisation would kindly step aside for the sociologists once it had displaced the priests.

Conclusion

4.1 While we live in a pluralised world we also live in a globalised world. Though a religious community may be only one stratum of a society, that stratum is global in scale and influence. A traditionally inclusive, all embracing institution such as the Church of England faces a crisis of internal contradictions because it is trying to hold together greatly differing and contradictory global strata of a pluralised world that cut across the institution, are larger than the institution, and represent the more powerful social forces shaping the twenty-first century on planet Earth. In my view, these forces of post-modernity, with a powerful intellectual elite pulling Anglicanism in one direction and a powerful international religious revitalisation in Evangelical Christianity pulling it in the other, will inevitably lead to intolerable contradictions in a pre-modern institution with or without the current controversy over inclusion of homosexuality in the priesthood. History may declare that the issue of gay rights split apart the world-wide communion of the Church of England. However, considering the underlying strains on a number of pre-modern British national institutions that currently face crisis in post-modernity, could this not simply have been the straw that broke the camel's back?

Notes

¹ The Church of England falls into the typological category of 'church' in a 'church', 'denomination', 'sect' trilogy of ideal types. Its inclusiveness/universalism makes it the religion of the society as a whole (Martin, 1967; Troeltsch, 1931/1971; Yinger, 1957/1971).

² This was a BA (hons) dissertation.

³ Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome

⁴ This is a pseudonym of the UK based project to ensure the anonymity of informants.

⁵ This number was determined by the size of the project - it was the entire staff team bar one who was not available for interview. The data was so rich and so consistent (I only realise how much so now having conducted numerous research interviews since this time) that it adequately served the purposes of gaining a rich expression of world-view and lifeworld. I am of the view that this was not atypical of Charismatic Christianity in this kind of setting.

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